

Parents Helping Students: *Learn Social Studies*

Most parents of elementary students feel comfortable helping their child with basic reading, spelling, and arithmetic. But often as parents we feel less confident about what we can do to assist our child with social studies.

We know that student achievement in social studies improves when students apply what they learn in school to real life situations. You have opportunities each day to encourage your child to apply the ideas and concepts learned in social studies at home. When we use ideas we make them real. Your home is an exciting laboratory for applying social studies knowledge.

The goal of social studies is to create responsible citizens. Responsible citizens use knowledge from history, geography, economics and government; thinking skills; and a commitment to democratic values to make informed decisions. The social studies curriculum encourages students to actively participate in their community.

We believe that many parents are already doing a variety of things that connect what students learn in social studies with their daily lives. Keeping a family calendar, watching specials on the history channel or public television, discussing whether to save or spend a gift of money all reinforce social studies ideas learned at school. Every time you make a connection between the world at home and an idea learned at school you are contributing to your child's success.

This year your child's teacher will be teaching factual knowledge and many concepts related to history, geography, economics and government. As parents we do not have to be experts in these subjects to help our children. We can ask questions and do many simple things like helping your child keep a scrapbook or reading books from the library together that will help them in social studies

Here are some fun and interesting ideas you can use. We do not expect you to do them all. We have listed many ideas so that you can **choose ones that interest you or are easy to incorporate into your family routine.** We have marked ideas that are particularly appropriate for early grade children with the symbol *.

You know best what you and your child will enjoy. Remember the most important things you can do to help your child become a life long learner is to encourage him/her to be observant and ask the question "why?" Have fun!

General



If you have a computer, bookmark some websites that are family friendly for easy access when a question pops up that needs an answer.



If you have subscriptions to news magazines, a daily paper or specialty magazines like National Geographic or the Smithsonian choose one article to read together and discuss.



If you do not subscribe to magazines and newspapers show your child how to access them using the Internet at home or the public library and choose an article to read together and discuss.



*Choose books that have social studies themes to read aloud to your child.

History



Visit historic sites and museums in your community and on family trips, get on their mailing lists so that you are aware of special programs and events planned for children.



Use family pictures to construct a family history for your child.



Discuss your family heritage with your child.



Ask older members of the family to tell a story from when they were young to your child. Your child can make a book of the story. A collection of these stories can become a treasured part of your family history.



Observe and question things in your environment like: How did your street get its name? How were other streets in your city named?



*Make a timeline for your kitchen or child's room and record the birthdays of all family members, holidays and events important to your family.



Discuss how do your family's religious or cultural values affect the decisions that you make as a family? These decisions are an important part of their cultural heritage; discuss them with your child.



Make a penny box with your child. Save up pennies for several weeks so you will have a selection of years. Your child should decorate the penny box with designs that are meaningful to him/her. Establish with your child the year of their birth. Find a penny that was made that year and put it in the box. Now look for a penny that was made the year your child was one and put that in the box. Continue for each year until now. Have the child try to remember what happened each year, and write it down. If you have a computer, you could begin a computer log, if not keeping the log on a piece of paper is just fine. You will have to supply information for the early years. On the child's birthday they should add another penny representing that year and add more to their log.

















Make a scrapbook with your child about his/her life. Before you start discuss with them what might be kept in the scrapbook. Certificates from school, photographs, religious awards, ticket stubs to amusement parks or museums, sports awards, a piece of music that was mastered, a piece of artwork that was created, memories recalled, a picture or sketch of their bedroom are all good places to start. It is important that your child's personality is reflected in the scrapbook. There is no "right" way to do this activity. It should be fun and include what is important to him/her.




*Mark your child's height on the edge of a door and record the date.


Geography


-  When you are in the car: Ask questions about the commercial vehicles on the road. What is that truck carrying? Where is that truck from? Who will use what is in that truck?
-  Repeat directions to where you are going when in the car. If your car is equipped with an on board compass point it out to your child and ask them to tell you what direction you are now headed when you make a turn.
-  When referring to the location of a friend's home, a business or gas station locate it using the words north, south, east, and west. "We are visiting Angela she lives on the south side of Elm Street."
-  If you have a computer with Internet access make your child the navigator on routine family trips in the car. Log on to mapquest.com, or any similar service, and print the directions for a place you go to often. Have your child play navigator the next time you drive to that place.
-  Ask questions like "In what direction are we headed?" "What is close to the place we are going to?" "What is far from the place we are going to?"
-  Observe your community's use of land: How is it used? Notice that some land is empty, some used for residences, some for farming, some for business, some for schools and government offices.
-  *Ask your child to play *Mother, May I?* with a younger child. Your child should use directions like right and left.
-  *Identify where the sun rises each morning with your child. Mark that direction east.
-  Have a world map or atlas handy to locate places that are in the news, where sports teams are from, or where family members live.
-  *Buy a puzzle of the United States. Children learn quickly the location of the states when playing with puzzles. Some children love to play *Beat the Clock* trying to see how fast they can put the puzzle together.
-  *Notice and point out natural features of the environment while you are driving or looking at pictures in a book or magazines and ask your child to describe them. Look for features like hills, dunes, forests, rivers, lakes, streams, deserts, and mountains. Discuss where else you would find these same natural features.
-  Post a map of Michigan in your home. Use it to show distances and where things are happening.
-  Plot your family vacation or trip on a map.


 Ask how your family communicates with others? Encourage your child to write to a member of the family that does not live in your home by writing a letter or sending an e-mail message.


 Ask where we get our information? Have a scavenger hunt in your home for all the ways that people in your family communicate and get information from others. Don't forget the mail, radio, television, videos, computers, and telephone. . .


Government


 Discuss community issues at home. Ask your child to tell what their opinion is on the issue. Allow your child to speak first. Ask them to tell why they think that way.

 Watch the TV news together and talk about the stories presented.

 Identify the core democratic values when they are part of a story in the news: life, liberty, pursuit of happiness, rule of law, free speech, freedom of religion, common good, justice, equality, diversity, popular sovereignty, and patriotism.


 When at a store or restaurant show the receipt to your child. Show them where the tax is added. Discuss the ways that the local community, state and national governments use taxes.


 *Know the name of the governor of Michigan and the President of the United States and use them so that your child will learn them.


 Know who your state and national representatives and senators are.

 Know who the leader of your community is.

 Vote and tell your child when you are going to do it.

 Who gets to tell another person what to do is an important idea to a child. Discuss authority with your child if an opportunity arises. Where does your authority to make rules in your home come from? Your authority to make rules for your children is universally acknowledged as traditional authority.

 Explain how government get its authority. The government's authority is legal authority that is granted by the citizens.

 Engage in a community service project with your child.

Economics



*What is your work? Do you provide a good or service? Talk to your child about your job. Tell them what you do.



How do bills get paid in your family? Do you pay your bills in person, use checks, or have them paid directly by your bank. If you feel comfortable show your child what a bill looks like and discuss what it pays. What services do you pay for monthly?



What are some opportunity costs that your family faces? All decisions have a cost. The cost is very often not money. It can be time or space. When you make a choice you give up the opportunity to use your money, time, or space in another way. For example if your child chooses to play after school, they give up the chance to get their homework done right away. When we choose to save money for a new car, we may give up the opportunity to take a family vacation. If we choose to spend time together as a family, we give up the opportunity to do things we like to do by ourselves. If we make our basement into separate bedrooms for children in the family, we give up the opportunity to use the basement for a family room everyone can use. Your child faces opportunity costs each time they make a choice. Help them recognize them.



*While you are putting together meals for your family have your child read labels and discover where things in your home were made? What country? Look at the labels of the food you eat. Where did it come from? Find the state or country on a map.



*When you are in the car identify the businesses that you pass as ones that produce goods and ones that provide services.



Ask people with whom you are acquainted to talk about their jobs with your child.



Take your child with you to the bank and talk about the services that are advertised in the bank while you are waiting your turn.



*What do things cost? Collect change over a few days. Ask your child to count the change. Now have your child look around the kitchen cupboards and discover what they could buy with the money on the table. To fully understand the concept of “money” children need to find out how we get money, and what it buys.